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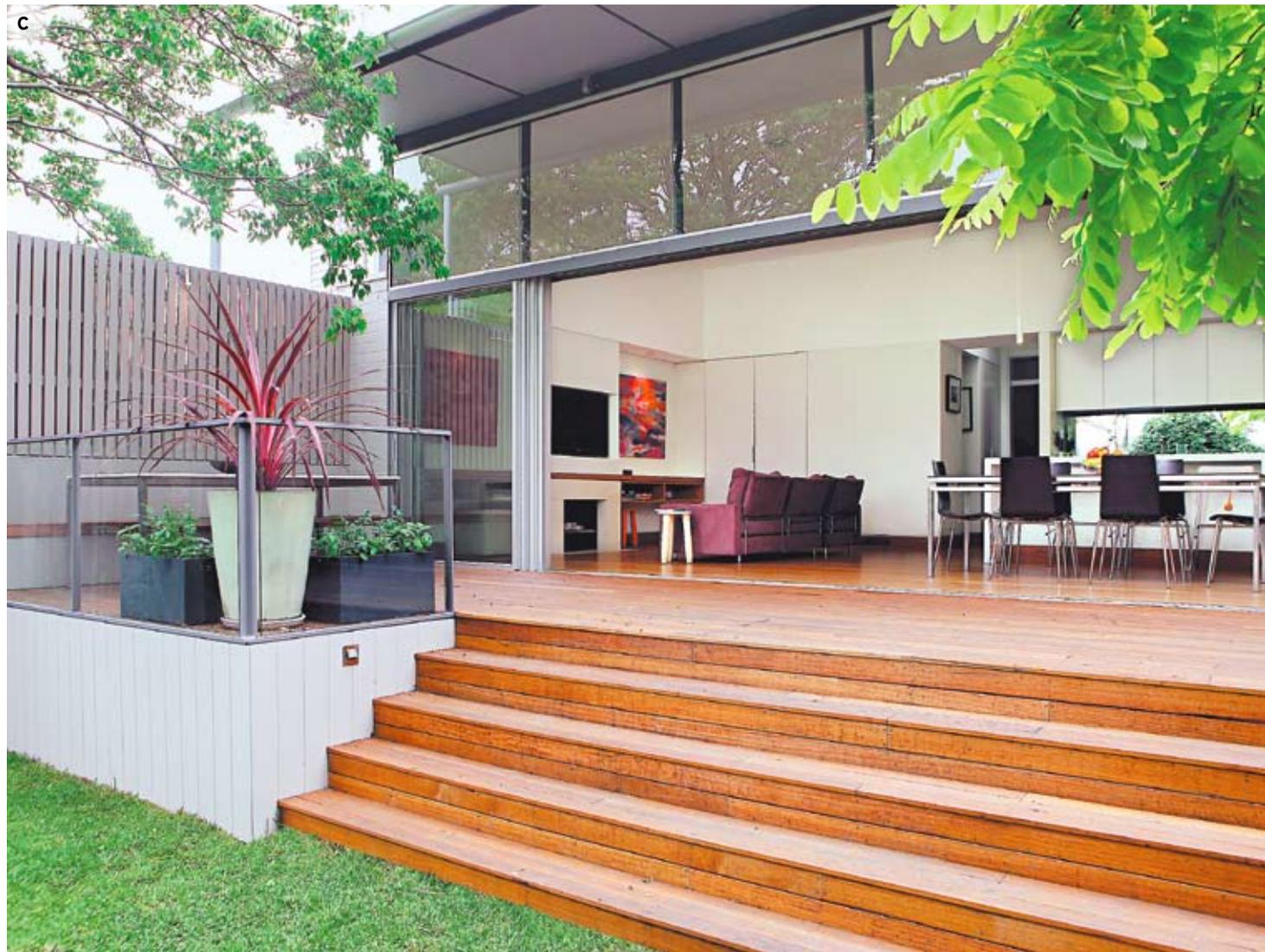
Fun and games

Decking out a new space so there's room to play **18**

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FACT FILE

THE BRIEF

To create a comfortable family home without having to change the existing footprint

THE FAMILY

Kirsten Matthews, Ben Shields and their sons Dylan, 5, and Connor, 3

THE ARCHITECT

Andrew Burns

THE BUILDER

Peter Ginns, Genuine Building Services

Great open spaces

A meeting of minds between architect, builder and owners produced an innovative design

There's a lot to recommend the inner western suburbs. Great restaurants and cafes, vibrant markets and easy access to Sydney Harbour are just a few of the attractions that have drawn increasing numbers of people to the area.

However, it is not known for its abundance of large family homes.

So for Kirsten Matthews and her husband Ben Shields, finding a four-bedroom house was a stroke of good luck.

Originally from Western Australia, they were used to larger homes and were looking for something with the capacity for them to create more useable space.

"We bought the house because it was a big place and it had a great big back room but it was really out-dated," Kirsten says.

Space race

The two-storey, four-bedroom home had a large kitchen that was positioned in the middle of the house.

Access to the small deck and garden was difficult thanks to an oddly designed living room and laundry. To add to the sense of enclosure, the ceiling was 2.4m high.

The couple wanted more space and a better connection with the outdoor area but not at the cost of their garden.

In recent years, local councils have begun to take greater interest in floor-to-space ratios which, simply put, refers to how much of the land is taken up by the house.

Kirsten and Ben's house was very nearly at the limit as it was.

Listening device

After living in it for a couple of years, Kirsten began looking for an architect who could help them make better use of the available space.

She spoke with a few architects before deciding on Andrew Burns.

"I had seen Andrew's work in the area and I spoke to a few architects and the difference was he listened to us," Kirsten says.

"You know when you're talking to someone who is on your wavelength. The important thing was it had to be liveable."

Andrew, who worked with Huw Morgan and Nath Rankothge on the design, agreed that the back rooms, which had been added to the house some time during the 1990s, could be working a lot harder.

"Like so many additions from that period it did not solve all the problems of the house," Andrew says.

"They had space but the quality of the space was not there."

Onwards and upwards

After lengthy discussions over a period of weeks, Andrew proposed a two-pronged approach to the back of the house which would only add another 4sq m to the building.

First was simplifying the layout to make the most of the full width of the house. A new, smaller but very functional kitchen was designed to sit in front of a new downstairs bathroom with a vestibule linking the old to the new.



These changes would provide the opportunity for more storage as well as acting as a means of pushing natural light in all directions.

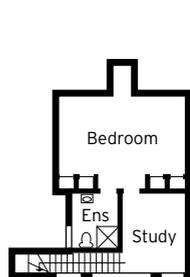
The open space would provide plenty of room for dining and living areas while the deck could be extended to make it a much more appealing and useable part of the house.

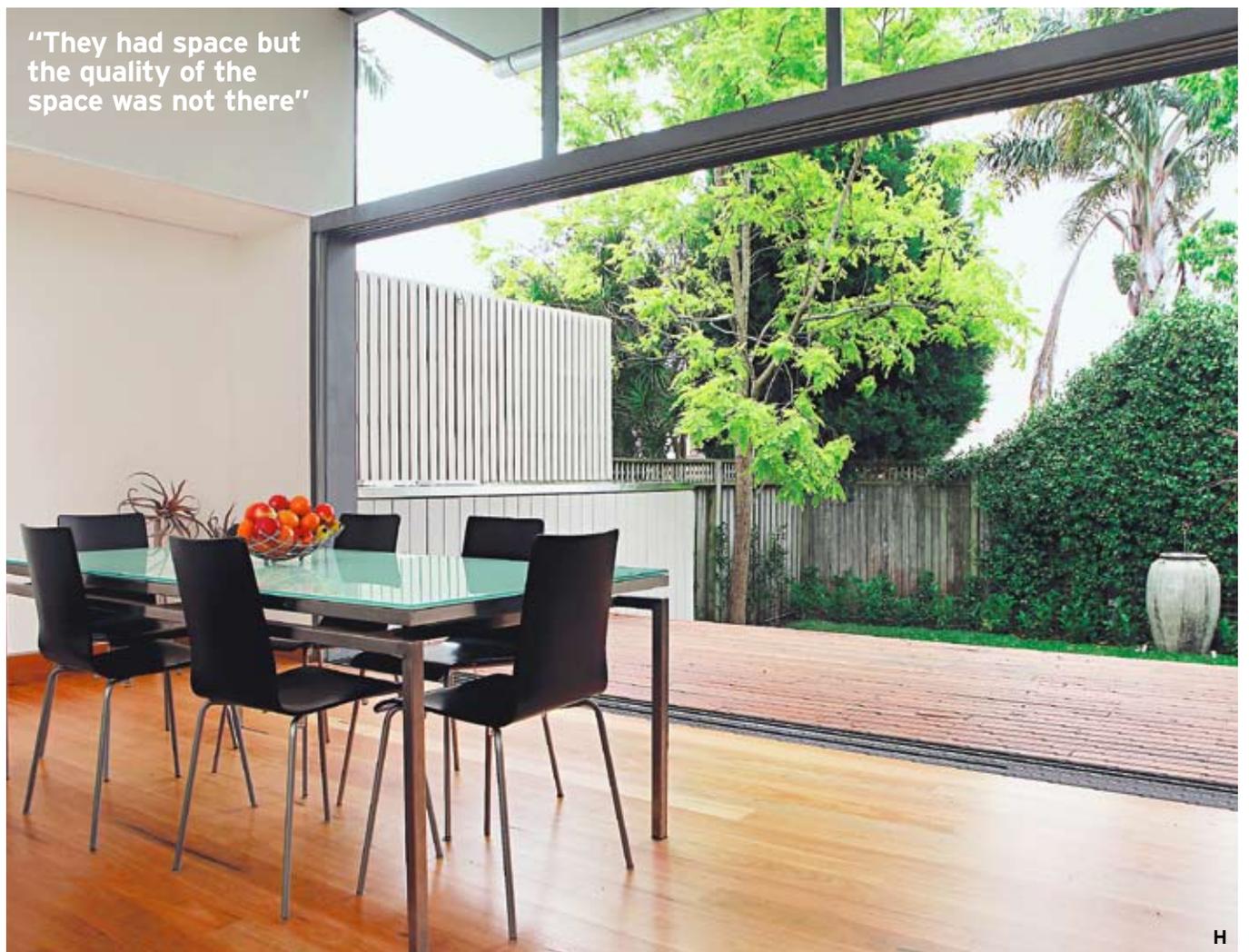
The second part of the plan was to raise the height of the ceiling in the living area significantly from 2.4m to 3.6m high.

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR





"They had space but the quality of the space was not there"

A Big family homes are few and far between in the inner west **B** Builder Peter Ginns and architect Andrew Burns **C** The renovated back room and deck, with raised ceiling and full-length windows looking out to the garden **D** Kirsten and son Connor make the most of the deck, which extends the useable space for the whole family **E** The new kitchen is smaller but well-designed **F** A large island bench separates the kitchen from the dining areas **G** Leaving the wall line at 2.4m while raising the ceilings increases the sense of space while maintaining the scale of the room **H** With the house already approaching its maximum footprint it was vital to retain the majority of garden space

This instantly gave the sense of a lot more room without adding more floor space. It allowed Andrew to introduce high windows to run the length of the room.

This pulled in abundant natural light as well as creating the feeling of the house being in the garden.

Andrew says they decided to maintain a line around the room at a height of 2.4m to reduce the scale of the room.

"Now we have a 3.6m ceiling but the line that runs around is 2.4m which is a comfortable scale so it works quite nicely and it allows everything to tie together," he says.

Outside, the deck was extended slightly to make it a more useable space.

Although it was extended a little, Andrew says it was well received by local council, who, he suspects, were expecting something far larger.

"They had to consider the height but by comparison to what they were accustomed to seeing, it was minor." >>

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» Insider knowledge

Although they were staying within the existing footprint, they did not want to build on top of the rear walls to increase the ceiling height.

Instead, Andrew and builder Peter Ginns from Genuine Building Services decided on a slightly unconventional method.

"The walls on the outside are retained and we brought two higher sections in from the side boundary to avoid problems with overshadowing," says Andrew.

"It also made a difference to how simple it was to construct."

Peter says the five-and-a-half month building process ran smoothly, largely because of the good preparation work.

Having worked together before, Andrew says although it was a more complex job than some others, it was well within their comfort zones. But Andrew says it would not have run so smoothly without the help of Kirsten and Ben.

"It helped that the clients were really good at making decisions," Andrew says.

"They would consider things, make a decision and that was it."

Kirsten says part of the reason they hired Andrew was his interest in collaborating with them.

"It is nice to have someone who appreciates that you have some knowledge of design," she says.

"He listened when we told him about the things that were important to us."

Robyn Willis

MORE INFORMATION

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Genuine Building Services 0419 226 153



A The sitting room leads through to the renovated back room
B The staircase to the upper storey
C The new, contemporary downstairs bathroom
D The unaltered main bedroom on the top storey, with a small window looking out to the street

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GET THE LOOK

Splash of colour ... All you need is one or two pieces of art to fill a space with colour and add vibrancy to a room. Bernd Heinrich's *Harmonic Minor*, costing \$6600, will do just that.



Save a seat ... Contrasting with the more traditional architectural elements of the sitting room, this modern chair adds to the fresh feel of the new design. These replica Barcelona chairs, available from Matt Blatt for \$1495, have that modern touch.

Top table ... A glass-topped table that reflects light doesn't interrupt the open feel of the kitchen. Dare Gallery's Metro table at \$649 and Lisbon chairs at \$99 each offer a similar look.



MORE INFORMATION

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